

Oppressive Lies

Psalm 12

“Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth!” “Help us, Lord, for godly, faithful people are disappearing from around us!” Most of us probably don’t feel this way, at least on the local level. There are over 60 congregations of believers belonging to different denominations in Claiborne County alone, and we probably don’t know very many people who aren’t a member of one of them. And of course, those who are attending or working at a Christian Academy are surrounded by those who are trying to follow Jesus.

But what about in the wider culture? In other places in this country, believers in Christ are increasingly coming under attack. The New York City School Board, for example, has decreed that no Christian congregation will be able to rent meeting space in public school buildings, even though school is not in session on Sunday. The Board says its intention is to “protect the minds of impressionable youth.” The ban will go into effect on February 12.

And what about the cultural values promoted by our mass media? Can we doubt that we live in a courser world, a more openly wicked world than Americans did only a few years ago? Can we doubt that wicked people are more open about their sin than ever before? After all, behavior that would once have been shunned or even considered criminal is now treated as normal or even celebrated.

Just this week, the US Supreme Court heard arguments that broadcast television stations should not be required to prohibit foul language and nudity during hours when children may be watching. Broadcasters argue that since there are so many cable channels available where anything at all can be heard and seen at any time, that it is unfair to put extra restrictions on broadcasters. The broadcasters thus recognize the problem that David saw – they see godliness in decline and the wicked all around them – but they want to join the party.

But we shouldn’t be surprised either at the rise of wickedness in the broader culture or at the refusal of many people to join in the fight for decency. Some two thousand years ago, Paul told his disciple Timothy that these very things would happen:

“But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. ² For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.” Well might we respond to such a

prophecy with the words of David: “Help us Lord, for the faithful have vanished from among the children of men!”

But this isn't just a problem for the world outside the church. No, Paul went on to tell Timothy that in the last days such wickedness would invade the church itself: “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions,⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.” And notice how Paul says this sort of wickedness will invade the church – people will turn away from the truth and listen instead to lies. In short, deception is the doorway which allows wickedness to invade the church and the culture as a whole.

David said the same thing in verse 2: the wicked, he says, are speaking vanity – worthless words, false words to one another. They flatter each other with their smooth talk, but all the while they speak with a double heart – they don't really mean what they are saying.

And isn't it obvious that such lies have infected our culture as a whole? We have encountered so many deceptive politicians we now simply say that they aren't so much lying as putting a “spin” on the truth. And our cynicism has increased to such an extent that we are more amazed when a politician keeps his word than when we find out he has broken it.

And hasn't smooth talk and double-dealing infected the Church as well? And no, I'm not just talking about shenanigans at the General Assembly level. How many of us Port Gibson Presbyterians say we believe in Jesus and proclaim that we want to follow Jesus but spend most of the week doing things that we know good and well Jesus wouldn't do and wouldn't want us to do either? How many of us rationalize away those parts of Scripture we aren't comfortable with, all the while roundly condemning others who ignore the particular verses that do happen to suit our fancy?

Worse yet, do we ever reassure others, or even ourselves, that it is alright not to follow some parts of the Scripture because, after all, no one else does, or because it's just old-fashioned, or because it just doesn't make sense to us? The inconvenient thing about truth, after all, is that it is an all-or-nothing proposition. How many of us are even trying to be faithful to the truth?

And what is the result of all of this deception? Well, what do you think about this very popular belief? “You don't need to wait until you are married to be intimate with one another. As long as two people love each other, what's the big deal?” This sort of thinking stood at the heart of what was called in the 1960's and 1970's “The Sexual Revolution.”

And what has been the result of people believing that there is no necessary connection between intimate relationships and marriage and children? Since 1973, over 50 million Americans never had the chance to be born, but have been slaughtered in the womb. The only reason the divorce rate is no longer climbing is that fewer and fewer couples ever bother to get married in the first place. And the single biggest predictor of poverty in America today is not a child's race or the educational level of his parents but simply the fact of his being born out of wedlock. The lies that fueled the Sexual Revolution have exposed America's children to murder and poverty at levels unimaginable to our ancestors.

Or what do you think of this statement? "Everyone in the entire country is able to do work that the market will value at \$7.25 per hour." That's what the Federal Government is saying when it establishes the minimum wage at that rate. So, what if that's not true? What if there are many people in this country whose level of education or skill doesn't equip them to contribute that much value to an employer? What happens to those whose labor simply isn't worth \$7.25 per hour? Well, it is illegal to employ such people, and in a county like ours with a largely unskilled population, it's no wonder that 39% of our population is living below the poverty level.

No, it's no wonder that David links the lies of the wicked in verse 2 to the oppression of the poor in verse 5. Lies always lead to injustice in one way or another. And it is the weak that always fare the worst.

What can we do about any of this? Well, what did David do? We don't know exactly when he wrote this psalm – perhaps it was while he was still a boy looking after his father's sheep. But even in those days Samuel the prophet had told David that he would one day reign as king. That prophecy came true, and David did indeed have the power to protect the poor by destroying injustice.

So, isn't it strange that nowhere in this psalm does David appeal to political power? He doesn't say, "When I am king I'll fix all this." He doesn't say, "Now that I am king I will wipe out all the lies and end all the oppression." Nowhere in this psalm does David look to kings to bring the safety to the poor that he mentions in verse 5.

But that's what we do most of the time, isn't it? We look, for example, at the problems caused by the sexual revolution as primarily political issues: we hear more about abortion and poverty from politicians than we do from preachers. We look at the minimum wage as a purely economic issue. We see nothing wrong with voting for candidates who take the positions that we hold on these issues. But at the same time, some of us might think that it is inappropriate to get

the Church mixed up in these kinds of problems. We might even squirm a bit when we hear them discussed in a sermon.

But David, the man who would be king, and later the man who was the king, didn't see the oppression of the poor and needy as primarily a problem for kings to solve. No, as we have seen in this psalm, David understood that there was a connection between lies and oppression. And so to tackle the problem of oppression, David first looks to the ultimate source of truth – to God.

And make no mistake – David's confidence in God is directly tied to his respect for God's Word. Look at verse 6 – you can't have a higher view of Scripture than this. He says the words of the Lord are pure, clean and genuine, as pure as silver that has been refined. The refining process involves heating metal in a furnace to the point where it melts. At that point, the impurities in the metal rise to the top and can be skimmed off. Silver that has been melted and skimmed seven times would be pure indeed.

So, why is it so important that God's Word be so pure? Because that ensures that it will never lead us astray. That means it is a true standard against which all other truth claims can be measured. Knowing God's Word is thus the best remedy for the empty words, the lies and the flattery that are all too common in our world. For if we know and trust God's Word, we will not be led astray by lies.

Where it comes, for example, to the lies of the sexual revolution, the ultimate answer is not to elect politicians who agree with Biblical views of marriage, although that certainly can't hurt. No, the ultimate answer is to tell the truth, to convince more and more people of the truth. All human life is sacred because people are made in the image of God. For children to flourish they need a father and a mother who are committed to a lifelong marriage. And that means that sexual relationships should be reserved for those who are joined in marriage.

What about economic issues? How are Christians called to help the poor? Jesus told us that we should give generously, but what's the best way to do that? The Law of Moses told farmers to leave the corners of their fields for people to glean – that was a way of providing work even for those who were too weak to be employed as reapers. Paul told Timothy that only helpless widows should be supported by the church – younger widows, he said, should be married, so that they could look to their families for support. Paul told the Thessalonians that if anyone would not work, he should not eat. How can Christians put all of these ideas into practice, helping people become gainfully employed? It's not as easy as handing out some spare change, is it?

But again, just having more people know the truth isn't the final answer, and David doesn't say that it is. Instead, at the very beginning of the psalm, David confesses his need for God's help, for God's intervention on behalf of those who are trying to live a godly life. In the same way, in verse seven David says that God is the One Who will preserve the poor and the innocent from the wickedness of his own generation. David thus understands that political power is not the answer – it is God's power that really matters.

Verse 5 makes this point with a statement from God Himself. It is God Who will arise and put an end to the oppression of the poor. It is God Who says He will insure the safety of the poor. And because this promise of help for the helpless comes from God, David understands that this promise is as pure and genuine and real as silver purified seven times. That is why David can be so certain in verse seven that God will in fact keep His people and preserve them forever.

So, it is not wrong for Christians to get involved in politics. It is not wrong for Christians to analyze laws and regulations with a critical eye and to work hard to alleviate the causes or the effects of poverty. Those are good things to do, and in a country like ours where the sovereignty resides in the electorate, it is the duty of all citizens to do those things.

But the more important thing, and the thing which all Christians everywhere need to do, is to confront the lies of this world by spreading the truth – the truth that all men are desperate sinners in need of a savior and that Jesus Christ is that Savior. We need to encourage more people to live according to Christ's law of love, giving ourselves to others, especially helping the poor and the weak. We need to spread the Word of God into the world, knowing that Christ is the true King Who will one day come again to make all things new.